1300 654 419
www.noplasticbags.org.au

Australian Government

AUSTRALIAN RETAILERS ASSOCIATION
Working for Retail

Clean up

RETAILERS' USER GUIDE

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This Retailers' User Guide has been developed by Clean Up Australia, the Australian Government and the Australian Retailers Association to help you and your customers say NO to plastic bags.

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Plastic Bags – The Price We Pay

Australians pay a big price for using plastic bags – from the devastation they cause to our unique natural environment, to the financial cost to the retail sector of supplying plastic bags to customers… the price we pay for using plastic bags really adds up.

'BAG' PRESS

Using too many plastic bags can cost you your public image and customer loyalty. Staff should pack around 8 items into each plastic carry bag for customers to reduce the use of plastic bags. Using fewer plastic bags also means cost savings for your business.

1. What's it costing you?

PLASTIC BAGS ARE COSTING YOU MORE THAN YOU THINK

When it comes to your customers' 'bag habits' you've probably noticed some changes. Whether they're picking up some papers and magazines from the local newsagent or grabbing a few basics at the corner store, 81% of Australians now use plastic bag alternatives, like calico or reusable bags because they care about the environment.

PLASTIC BAGS – THE BOTTOM LINE...

Financial Cost: Supplying plastic bags is a business expense with no financial return.

Customer Loyalty & Public Image: Most customers now prefer plastic bag alternatives because they care about protecting the environment…and they want to shop at retailers who are doing their bit to help the environment too.

Lost Advertising Opportunities: Many small businesses are now selling their own plastic bag alternatives at a profit and advertising their business on their bags at the same time.

What's it costing the environment?

Plastic bags are a serious threat to our environment and natural resources – not only do they spoil our parks and beaches - but they can also take up to 1000 years to break down.

Plastic bags are responsible for blocking drains and harming our wildlife - both marine and land-based animals.

As a retailer, you can help put an end to this destruction and show your customers that you're environmentally responsible by simply saying NO to plastic bags.

What's it costing the country?

Australians used 4.7 billion plastic bags last year with many millions ending up as litter, blocking waterways and harming our wildlife. At the current rate of usage, our capital cities will reach their present landfill capacity by 2010. The financial cost of rectifying environmental problems caused by plastic bag waste and litter is enormous, not to mention the total economic cost to the Australian retail sector of supplying plastic bags to customers.

Help reduce the cost. Say NO today

BONNYRIGG GARDEN CENTRE REDUCES PLASTIC BAG USE & REAPS THE BENEFITS

Selling plants might be a grubby business, but that hasn't stopped Bonnyrigg Garden Centre from making the change to plastic bag alternatives.

Sandra Zust, Showroom Manager, was initially a little apprehensive about making the switch to plastic bag alternatives, as many of the plants she sells can make a bit of a mess when customers take them home, particularly in car boots.

To overcome potential objections from customers, Sandra introduced a range of solutions including reusable polypropylene bags and reusable plastic car boot liners, both of which have been printed with the store's logo and details.

Although she's only been selling the reusable bags for a couple of months, Sandra has already seen business benefits - many customers have come back to the store to reuse them.

"I've also noticed a reduction in the number of plastic bags we're giving out – which has got to have a long-term cost benefit to the business. I'm also happy that I can advertise the business cheaply on something my customers can reuse," Sandra said.

Sandra sells her reusable bags for $1, but has given her staff discretion to give them away if customers spend over $30. *"The customers appreciate the added service,"* she said.

Facts & Figures

DID YOU KNOW...?

* Australians use 13 million plastic bags a day.
* Almost half of these bags are given away by non-supermarket retailers such as newsagents, discount stores, pharmacies, fruit and vegetable shops, liquor stores and take-away outlets.
* Plastic bags suffocate, disable and kill thousands of marine mammals and sea birds worldwide each year. When the animal dies and decays, the plastic bag is free again to repeat the deadly cycle.
* It only takes 4 grocery trips for an average Australian family to accumulate 60 plastic shopping bags.
* Australians throw away about 4,000 recyclable plastic bags a minute, with 230,000 recyclable plastic supermarket bags dumped in landfill every hour.
* Plastic was the most common source of rubbish found on Clean Up Australia Day 2005, accounting for 32%. Of this plastic rubbish, plastic bags accounted for 7%.

About Say NO

Clean Up Australia has been committed to getting rid of plastic bags since 2001. In partnership with the Australian Government, the Australian Retailers Association, the major supermarkets, Stockland Shopping Centres and many non-supermarket retailers, we've helped decrease plastic bag numbers by 34% - that's 1 billion bags - but there's still a lot more work to be done…

Our 'Say NO to Plastic Bags' program encourages shoppers and retailers to start using alternatives and increase plastic bag recycling.

As a small business operator, you'll find all the information, materials and advice you'll need to say NO to plastic bags here in this user guide.

2. Easy Steps to Say NO

HELP YOUR CUSTOMERS KICK THE 'BAG HABIT'!

With a little help from you, we can continue to slash our plastic bag use.

Here are some quick, easy tips to help you and your customers say NO to plastic bags:

TRAIN STAFF

* Phrases like *"We prefer not to supply plastic bags"* or *"We prefer not to give out plastic bags to our customers"* are very effective in helping shoppers to say NO.

ENCOURAGE CUSTOMERS

* Encourage customers to purchase a reusable bag if you have them. Ask customers if they really need a bag – help your customers say NO!
* Supply your customers with reusable bags with your logo on them – be proactive and promote your store at the same time. Or give away reusable bags if a customer spends over a certain amount.
* Encourage customers to NOT need a plastic bag by suggesting they bring reusable bags back next time they shop, especially if they are worried about paying for an alternative.
* Educate customers about your bag policy by adding a message to your till display or to the bottom of customer receipts.
* Team up with other retailers to run a 'bag swap'. For every 20 plastic bags handed in, shoppers receive a reusable bag.
* Approach your local council to sponsor the reusable bags and to collect and recycle the plastic bags.

SELL ALTERNATIVE OR REUSABLE BAGS

* Sell your own alternative bags such as recycled paper, calico and polypropylene ('green') bags.
* Consider teaming up with other retailers to purchase them in bulk and save money.
* Find the right alternative bag for you (go to page 9)

PROMOTE YOUR EFFORTS

* Promote your bag reduction efforts to the local media.
* Purchase a Retailer's Kit from Clean Up Australia for promotional material like posters, stickers, shelf-wobblers and badges for your store.

To get a copy of the kit call Clean Up Australia on 1800 024 890.

Kits cost $45 incl. GST with discounts for more than 10 kits (Consider teaming up with other retailers in your area to purchase kits).

3. Plastic Bag Phase-Out

Governments are currently working in conjunction with retailers to phase-out single-use plastic bags by the end of 2008. If you don't have plastic bag alternatives ready to go in your store by this date, you'll be left behind.

If you are a retailer selling food products, you will need to consider food safety, hygiene and cross-contamination issues when considering alternatives to light-weight plastic bags. Consider replacing light-weight plastic bags with paper bags, biodegradable bags or other options (like barrier bags) if it is practical for your business, and aim to reduce your store's use of plastic bags.

Plastic bag use, other than for food and safety reasons, is an unnecessary use of resources and sends a negative environmental message that can lead to a loss of customer loyalty.

By acting now, you'll have plenty of time to explore the alternatives, choose the right one for your business, cut your plastic bag costs and start marketing your actions to your customers and the media.

SNOWY CAMPING WORLD PHASES-OUT PLASTIC

Sometimes it's not what you use but how sparingly you use it, which makes a difference! That's the motto of Bridget McCosker who runs Snowy Camping World at Cooma, in the Snowy Mountains Region of NSW. Bridget has made the switch from plastic bags and now provides her customers with heavy paper carry bags. She knows her customers appreciate being able to use a smart, good quality bag which is also environmentally friendly.

Bridget has found the best weapon in the war against plastic bags is to simply ask her customers, *"Would you like a bag?".*

"I've found that if I ask my customers if they want a bag, many of them say no – which saves me time and money. I've also trained my staff to ask the same question. Most customers appreciate my desire to be environmentally friendly, and that's good PR for my business," Bridget said.

"When use of plastic bags became a hot issue, many of my suppliers who used to provide me with free plastic bags stopped doing so. So this kind of left me with no choice but to go plastic bag free. Now I think it's a great initiative!"

'BAG' HABITS

Bag Habits are hard to change… here are some ways to do so.

Staff should never 'double-up' on plastic bags when packing items for customers. This is an unnecessary use of resources and sends a negative environmental message that can lead to a loss of customer loyalty.

National Phase-Out Policy

In 2002, the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC), made up of Australian Government and State and Territory Environment Ministers, agreed on a national approach to reduce light-weight plastic bag use.

The EPHC set tough reduction and recycling targets in the Code for major supermarkets – the number of plastic bags issued by supermarkets had to fall by 25% by the end of 2004 and 50% by the end of 2005.
A recycling rate of 15% (through in-store collection) was also set for the end of 2005.

They decided that a National Code of Practice for the management of light-weight plastic bags was needed, with participation rates of 90% for supermarket/retail chains and 25% for smaller retailers.

Industry Initiatives

The Australian Retailers Association worked with the Environment Protection and Heritage Council as well as individual retailers to develop a Voluntary Code of Practice to reduce plastic bag use in the retail sector.

THE CODE OF PRACTICE SPLITS RETAILERS INTO TWO GROUPS

Group One Retailers

* Includes major and smaller supermarket chains and independent supermarkets sponsored by wholesalers or run under banner groups.
* These signatories need to provide audited results showing reduction and recycling levels.
* These organisations provide significant funding towards the industry communications campaign as well as adjusting their operations to support the Code initiatives.

Group Two Retailers

* Includes all other businesses using light-weight plastic carry bags.
* It is not compulsory for Group Two retailers to commit to the Code in its entirety, although retailers are encouraged to read it.
* A number of Group Two retailers have already signed the Code and are working to implement positive changes in their business.

THE VOLUNTARY CODE OF PRACTICE

Key commitments for Group Two Retailers:

* Train staff to support the Code's aims.
* Sell reusable bags in your stores if practical.
* Let your customers know you are a Code signatory and that you support the Code's aims.
* Make information available to customers about how they can participate.
* Provide recycling bins if practicable.
* Provide recycled content bags if possible.
* Provide the ARA with figures on the number of bags you purchased in 2003, 2004 and 2005 (form available), to be used as part of industry reporting.

Group Two retailers are asked to commit to the Code's principles and support the Code's key commitments, where practical. e.g. if it is not practical for you to sell reusable bags in your stores or to provide recycling bins, then you may choose to focus on training staff to reduce bag use and educate customers about how they can participate.

For more information about the Voluntary Code of Practice, visit www.aransw.com.au or contact the Australian Retailers Association on (02) 9290 3766.

Remember, our Government wants to phase-out plastic bags by the end of 2008. By taking action now, you'll be gearing your business up for the phase-out and ensuring you and your customers are ready.

4. Alternatives

You can choose from a range of affordable plastic bag alternatives to benefit your business and help the environment.

CHIRN PARK NEWS TAKES ACTION

Dee and Chris Pieper, owners of Chirn Park News on the Gold Coast, QLD, are making their dream of a plastic bag free future, a reality.

Their plastic bag and environmental policy is proudly displayed on their shop's front window and states that if a customer wants a plastic bag they will be charged 25 cents. And from 31 December 2005, they'll remove the option to purchase a plastic bag altogether.

Instead of plastic bags, Chirn Park News offers its customers reusable, unbranded bags suitable for newsagency products and available for purchase at a realistic price of $1.30.

"We have sourced a supply of bags at a very reasonable cost and have applied a small mark-up to these," explained Dee.

"All of the profits generated from the sale of these bags, and in the short term the plastic bags, are fed back into the local community for environmental projects. We are marketing this to our customers with fliers placed in all areas around the store and advising customers at the counter," Dee continued.

"So far we have only had one negative response but have received an amazing show of support for our actions," said Dee.

Since introducing the store's plastic bag policy, Dee and Chris have enjoyed many benefits to their business including reduced costs with the elimination of plastic bags, support for their actions from customers and an increase in customer traffic from people who feel the same way as they do.

"As I see it, going plastic bag free will only result in a win-win situation for us, a healthier environment and at the end of the day, more money in our pockets," said Dee.

A 'BAG' ALTERNATIVE

Make sure you price your alternatives at an acceptable level. Reusable bags should be inexpensive to encourage more customers to use them instead of plastic bags. Up to $2 is a reasonable charge that should still allow for a profit on each sale.

Biodegradable & Degradable Plastic Bag info

When you start thinking about which plastic bag alternative to use, you might notice there are a variety of 'degradable' and 'biodegradable' bags on the market.

Biodegradable bags are often made from farmed products like cornstarch, which, in the right conditions, will break down into elements like carbon dioxide, water and methane. Biodegradable bags are generally best suited to composting and may contribute to methane emissions if sent to landfill. To meet international standards, bags need to compost within 12 weeks and fully biodegrade within 6 months. Biodegradable bags are not suited to recycling.

Other degradable plastic bags break down primarily through the reaction of a chemical additive to oxygen, light or heat and are also known as 'oxodegradable' bags. Best suited to landfill disposal, they are also likely to survive long enough to present a threat to animals if littered. As it may take time for them to break down completely, they may pose a threat to animals who mistake the pieces for food. These bags can be recycled.

It's important to understand the difference between these bags and the impact they can have on the environment. Replacement of normal plastic with degradable and biodegradable bags is not encouraged by governments as part of the planned phase-out, as neither is a solution to plastic bag litter.

Standards Australia is currently developing Australian Standards for degradable (including biodegradable) plastics. In time, these may help you to be sure the bags you're buying are as degradable as they claim.

Meanwhile, ask your supplier some detailed questions to make sure you get what you want:

* What are the bags made from and how do they degrade?
* How long will the bags take to break down in their intended disposal environment?
* Will my customers know how to dispose of them (e.g. are they clearly labelled as compostable or landfill compatible)?
* Can the supplier provide you with data from any testing completed to back-up their claims about degradability? For example, does the product pass relevant international Standards, such as the European composting/biodegradability standard known as EN 13432.

Produce Your Own Reusable Bags

When you're looking for an alternative to plastic bags for your retail outlet, consider producing your own and discover the benefits.

* Sell your alternative bags to customers at a profit.
* Price your alternatives at an acceptable level. Reusable bags should be inexpensive to encourage more customers to use them as an alternative to plastic bags. Up to $2 is a reasonable charge that should still allow for a profit on each sale.
* Alternative bags are a great advertising opportunity - print your logo and store details on your own bags.
* Enhance your public image and customer loyalty – promote your efforts to your customers and the local media.
* Bags can be customised to the right size, shape and colour for your business.

3-Step Bag Selector

STEP 1: CHOOSING THE RIGHT OPTIONS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Bag Type	Benefits	Ideal For…
Polypropylene ('green' bags)	Reusable Long life (up to 3 years) Suitable for most retailers Easy to clean and pack Can be branded for marketing opportunities	Pharmacy Newsagent Hardware Discount Store Liquor Market Green Grocer Service Station Corner/Convenience Supermarket
Paper	Can be made from recycled paper Suitable for smaller, lighter items Can be branded for marketing opportunities	Liquor Store Take Away Pharmacy Newsagent Discount Store Market Green Grocer Service Station Corner/Convenience Supermarket
Calico	Reusable & easy to wash Fits easily into a glove box, handbag or pocket for portability Designed to fit current shopping bag packing systems	Liquor Store Pharmacy Newsagent Hardware Discount Store Market Green Grocer Corner/Convenience Supermarket
Biodegradable (Starch Based)	May be made from renewable resources. They should only be used for products that are compostable e.g. food.	Take-Away Fish Monger/Butcher Green Grocer
Other Packing Options	Such as hard plastic boxes and shopping trolley bags	Supermarket Green Grocer Hardware
Other Carry Bags	Such as jute, hessian, nylon, silk or mesh	Supermarket Corner/Convenience Green Grocer Market

STEP 2: CHOOSING AN ETHICAL SUPPLIER

When you're looking for an alternative bag supplier, there are some important questions you need to ask.

If a company can't or won't answer these questions, consider taking your business elsewhere.

1. **What is their alternative made of?**
   e.g. polypropylene, cotton, jute, paper etc. Investigate further if a supplier says their product is made of 'cloth' – they may be trying to convince you the material is natural fibre, when in fact it may be synthetic.
2. **Where is the product manufactured?**
   A number of alternative bags are made overseas. This doesn't mean you should refuse to purchase the product – it just gives you a context, particularly for some of the questions below. Be careful of companies trying to pass their product off as 100% Australian made when this may not be the case.
3. **What kind of employment practices are used to make the product?**
   e.g. does the company use child or forced labour? If the factory runs 24 hours, how long are shifts and break periods? Does the company comply with International Labour Organisation standards? Suppliers should not be selling products made using child/forced labour or under poor working conditions. The supplier should be able to provide evidence of working conditions, for example, a signed statement on letterhead from the manufacturer.
4. **Is the manufacturing process environmentally sound?**
   e.g. does the company try to minimise the amount of natural resources used during production? How does the company manage its waste? Are off-cuts reused or recycled? Are heavy metal or toxic dyes used? Does the company try to conserve energy and water in production?
5. **Does the product contain any recycled content?**
   e.g. off-cuts from polypropylene bags can be re-used in new bags.
6. **For paper bags, is a proportion of the bag made from recycled fibre?**
   Is the paper harvested from plantation trees or old growth forest?

STEP 3: FIND THE RIGHT SUPPLIER

Supplier Directory

Looking for an alternative bag supplier? Choose from the selection below – reusable bags can be delivered to you anywhere in Australia.

These suppliers are not endorsed by the Australian Government, Clean Up Australia or the Australian Retailers Association. We strongly recommended you ask suppliers a series of key questions to determine the company's business practices, labour policies and environmental credentials before purchasing any products.

PAPER BAGS

* Detpak – (02) 9648 2644 or via www.detpak.com (offices also in QLD, VIC, SA, TAS, WA and NT)
* Bee Dee Bags – 1300 302 688 or via www.beedeebags.com.au (offices in NSW, VIC & WA)

CALICO BAGS

* Adsun - (07) 3399 7933 or via www.adsun.com.au
* Pope Packaging – (03) 9329 8699 or via www.popes.com.au (offices also in QLD, NSW, WA, SA)

POLYPROPYLENE OR 'GREEN' BAGS

* Smartbag - (02) 9681 3984 or via www.smartbag.com.au. Smartbag provide bags in a supermarket style and a handy fold-up version.
* Adsun - (07) 3399 7933 or via www.adsun.com.au
* The Fresh Green Bag – (02) 9736 3274 or via www.thefreshgreenbag.com.au

BIODEGRADABLE STARCH BASED BAGS

* PCC Plastics – (02) 4954 8844 or via www.merinoptyltd.com.au
* Allviron – (03) 9357 9744 or via www.allviron.com.au

JUTE BAGS

* MJK Traders - (02) 8814 8111. Provide jute bags in a range of colours.

HESSIAN BAGS

* Pope Packaging – (03) 9329 8699 or via www.popes.com.au (offices also in QLD, NSW, WA, SA)

5. Contact Us

If you have any questions about how you can say NO to plastic bags, contact our Plastic Bag helpdesk telephone service on 1300 654 419, or send us an email at info@noplasticbags.org.au.

Other Useful Contacts

Australian Retailers Association
Website: www.aransw.com.au
Phone: 02 9290 3766
Email: info@nsw.ara.com.au

Department of the Environment and Heritage
Website: www.deh.gov.au
Phone: 02 6274 1111
Email: plastics@deh.gov.au

Clean Up Australia
Website: www.cleanup.com.au
Phone: 1800 024 890
Email: cleanup@cleanup.com.au